

## **Most not prepared for attack**

By Mimi Hall, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Most Americans have not followed the government's advice to prepare for terrorism by stocking food and water, making a plan to contact family members and identifying a "safe room" in their homes, a USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll shows.

A year after the Department of Homeland Security launched a multimillion-dollar public relations campaign to encourage people to prepare for an attack, the percentage doing so is dropping sharply.

Four in 10 people say they have a stockpile of food and water at home, down from six in 10 a year ago. Fewer than four in 10 have a designated contact person to help their families coordinate actions. And one-quarter of those polled have a designated "safe room."

"Americans are asleep at the switch when it comes to their own safety," says American Red Cross President and CEO Marsha Evans.

The level of preparedness has declined despite the government's warning early last year that people should prepare for a possible attack involving biological, chemical or radiological weapons. That led to a run on emergency items such as duct tape and plastic sheeting used to seal windows and doors.

"The further away that we get from Sept. 11 and the more time that lapses without a terrorist attack or major disaster, the more challenging it is to get people to take these types of actions," says Homeland Security Department spokesman Brian Roehrke.

Pat Mann, 44, of Bay Village, Ohio, says his family stocked some food and other supplies a year ago. But like many people, they ate the dry cereal and canned fruit they had stored in the basement as the expiration dates approached, and they haven't replaced it.

"We have let our guard down," Mann says. "It's not that I feel there's any less risk. I just haven't thought about it as much."

Another poll out today shows that more than three-quarters of Americans are unaware of, or unfamiliar with, their state or local government emergency plans.

That poll, commissioned by the Council for Excellence in Government, found that 27% were aware of school emergency plans; 36% were aware of plans at the office.

"We're talking about a nation that is largely unprepared," the council's Patricia McGinnis says.

"I don't think Americans are ignoring the issue," he says. "They're putting it in perspective relative to all the other things going on in their lives."

Other findings by the council:

- Nearly half of those polled say they believe the United States is safer than it was on Sept. 11, up from 38% a year after the attacks.

- One in three say a major attack against Americans at home or abroad is very likely in the next few months. That's down from 55% in October 2002.